

"Bear"ing gifts

The Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition in St Louis, a partner agency with the Metro East Foster Care and Adoption Alliance, delivered nearly 500 Build-A-Bear Workshop stuffed animals to member agencies in September. Some provided them to foster families or to parents and children receiving child welfare services. Others chose to wait for Christmas and will include them in their annual parties for foster parents and children.



Youth volunteers at local stores built the bears, as part of the Build-A-Bear Workshops' annual Stuffed With Hugs Day. This year foster children were the chosen group to receive the special toys. Participating agencies included: DCFS, Catholic Charities, Catholic Social Services, CHASI, Hoyleton Youth and Family Services, Lutheran Child and Family, and Mentor. Each agency will also have bears to give to foster children as well as children waiting for adoption throughout the year.

Meet Regional Administrator Michael J. Ruzicka

In August, Michael Ruzicka assumed the duties of Acting Regional Administrator in the Southern Region. In October Ruzicka was formally appointed to the position. Ruzicka replaced Bill Peyton, who accepted another position with the Illinois Department of Corrections.

Ruzicka has a background in law and child welfare. He has served children and families in many capacities in and outside of DCFS. Ruzicka first came to DCFS after working as a juvenile probation officer in Missouri and an adult probation officer in Houston, Texas. He worked as a Child Protection Investigator while attending law school at night, and upon completing law school was the Cook Regional Attorney. He left the department in 1992 to establish a private law practice, based in child welfare. His clients included hospitals, county governments, parents, children, and foster parents in various court actions. Ruzicka also argued before the Appellate Court on behalf of foster parents and children. Ruzicka rejoined DCFS and served as the Regional Counsel in the Northern Region,

before his new position in Southern Region.

Mr. Ruzicka assumed his responsibilities in time to

attend the Southern Region's Permanency Symposium and the foster parent picnic at the DuQuoin state fair. He was also active in helping review and revise the Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council's foster parent law implementation plan.

"Foster parents are the front line in providing our children with a chance for a better future, whether it is to return to their home or finding a home outside their biological family" he said recently. "The children would have a much tougher road without them."

He plans on using his direct experience working with foster parents to further improve the Department's relationship with them.



Michael J. Ruzicka

Southern Region Advisory Council Update

The DCFS Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council concluded its 2007 activities on November 6 when the Council met to review and approve the Region's 2008 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. New statewide standards for evaluating plans were implemented this year with more focus being placed on the services actually available to foster families. Additionally, in contrast to previous years when plans were awarded a numerical score, plans will now be evaluated on an acceptable/unacceptable basis.

Training on the Foster Parent Law and the Implementation Plan was also conducted in September and October at various sites throughout the Region.

Foster parent participation in Advisory Council activities is an important component in the Region's plan. Next year it is expected that meetings will continue to be held at various 'satellite' sites to maximize foster parents' opportunities to participate. A schedule of all the Advisory Council meetings will be mailed to foster families after the first of the year.

If you would like more information about the Advisory Council or would like to participate please contact Michael Bollman, Co-Chair, in the Fairview Heights office at 618-394-2137.

New Statewide Advisory Council Member



Willie Miller

Willie Miller of Xenia is the Southern Region's new representative to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council.

Miller is a familiar figure to many foster parents in Marion and Clay counties, as he has been a Foster Parent Support Specialist in that area for the past two years. He's also no stranger to the workers in the area. He and wife Evelyn have fostered approximately 15 children since they were licensed in 1998. They have adopted three children and accepted subsidized guardianship of one.

Miller fills the position on the council vacated by Vicky Kline, who had served for the past six years, the maximum term. Various management staff recommended Miller to fill the four-year post. Bob Cain, Marion-area placement manager, based his recommendation on Miller's "cooperative and caring nature in addressing the needs of foster families and children in care. He is a community volunteer who works in other areas to assure that foster families receive the support they need," said Cain.

In addition to his work in DCFS, Miller founded Community Outreach in November 2000. Largely through his vigorous effort Community Outreach has grown from a food pantry serving a very

local population, to providing food for over 600 families each month. Additionally, Community Outreach has provided books, school supplies, Christmas gifts, and clothing for foster children.

Miller has been a member of the Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council for a number of years and looks forward to jumping into the activities of the statewide council.

He feels that key issues confronting foster parents relate directly to the Foster Parent Law, particularly the rights referring to treating foster parents with dignity and respect. Other concerns that he feels should be addressed include placement procedures and staffing.

OUR KIDS

Sponsor

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

PRIDE training goes digital with new computerized services

The DCFS Office of Training announced that it will soon offer the in-service PRIDE training modules as an interactive CD-ROM format in addition to the traditional classroom format. The digital format will provide any-time, anywhere use, allowing caregivers to receive training, while working around the other responsibilities that compete to for their time.

The nine in-service modules in PRIDE Digital Curriculum use the same combination of co-trainers that are featured in all the PRIDE classroom training programs. A child welfare professional and a foster parent professional guide at-home learners through each module. Using video and an easy-to-use computer format, the computerized course presents the information and recorded discussions from other caregivers, adopted individuals and agency staff with knowledge of Illinois' child welfare system. The digital system takes learners through exercises to test their understanding of the material. It saves exercises so caregivers can document their work for each module.

DCFS continues to work with Governor's State University on this project and the plans for making the digital courseware widely available. Details will be included on the training pages of future issues of this newsletter. Contact Jean Maher of the DCFS Office training at 217-524-3539 for more information.

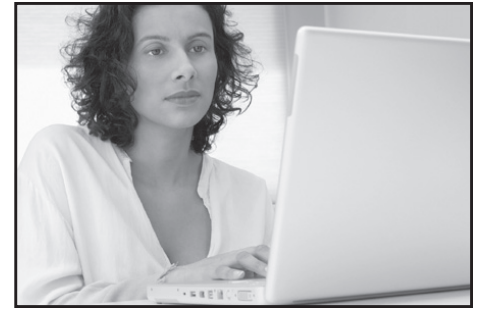
Virtual Training Center offers on-line convenience

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is a new on-line learning resource center from the Office of DCFS Training. All caregivers, DCFS or private agency staff or other child welfare partners will be able to access the on-line training center through the Internet at www.dcfstraining.org. All training registration, current schedules, updated announcements, training transcripts, and learning resources (including the foster parent library), will ultimately be available on-line in the center. The Department is asking each licensed caregiver with both the Department and the private child welfare agencies to register for a VTC account.

With a VTC account, caregivers can see their own transcripts at any time, search for the most up-to-date schedules of classes available, and even search the foster parent library for resources. It will save time by allowing caregivers to register for training on-line using a computer. It will also make it easier for the Department to communicate updates through e-mail.

To start a VTC account, all users need to complete a VTC Training Account form, which only takes a few minutes.

1. Go to the VTC Web site, look in announcements section, and click on the link to the form.



Users can fill it out on-line and submit via e-mail, **or**

2. Complete the form on-line, print it, and fax to the Registration Unit at 217-782-9301, **or**
3. Contact the DCFS Registration Unit at 877-800-3393, and they will e-mail the form. For caregivers who don't have e-mail, the Unit can mail the form or complete it by telephone.

Even caregivers that do not have access to the Internet are still being asked to complete the personal account form to ensure an accurate training profile for them is included in the DCFS database.

The Registration Unit and toll free number 1-877-800-3393 will still be operational after the VTC has been activated. However, the VTC is the gateway to training schedules, on-line registration, accessing your transcripts, and taking on-line classes.

If you have questions, contact Mary Ochman-Ahmed by e-mail at Mary.Ochman-Ahmed@Illinois.gov or by phone, at 217-785-5689.

Southern Region Training Calendar

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is required. Training dates, times and locations are subject to change.

Module 4 - *The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse* (9 training hours)

Participants learn to differentiate normal from problematic sexual behaviors in children and youth, signs and symptoms of sexual abuse and ways to help sexually abused children recover.

Marion *The Pavilion*
March 4, 6 & 11
(Tue/Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Module 12 - *Understanding and Promoting Preteen and Teen Development* (6 training hours)

This new course will assist Caregivers to identify developmentally appropriate ways to best promote healthy development for preteens and teens who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma. This six-hour module will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand the teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies

that caregivers can use fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

Fairview Heights *DCFS Office*
Dec. 4 & 6 (Tue/Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Feb. 5, 12 & 19 (Tue) 6-9 p.m.

Granite City *Catholic Charities*
Jan. 18 & 25 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Mt. Vernon *DCFS Office*
Feb. 13 & 20 (Wed) 6-9 p.m.

Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care (6 training hours)

Mt. Vernon *DCFS Office*
Feb. 27 & March 5
(Wed) 6-9 p.m.

Belleville *Catholic Social Services*
March 6 & 13 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Educational Advocacy

6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

Belleville *Catholic Social Services*
Dec. 29 & Jan. 5 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Carbondale *Carbondale Civic Ctr.*
Jan. 8 & 15 (Tue) 6:30 -9:30 p.m.

Effingham *DCFS Office*
Jan. 7 & 14 (Mon) 6 -9 p.m.

Fairview Heights *Four Points Sheraton*
Jan. 19 & 26 (Sat) 9 a.m.-Noon

Child Trauma

4 training hrs.

This four-hour course helps caregivers recognize the signs of trauma and understand how to work with children who have experienced traumatic events.

Marion *The Pavilion* **Fairview Heights** *Ramada Inn*
Jan. 19 (Sat) 9 a.m.-1 p.m. March 29 (Sat) 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.

Call the DCFS Office of Training

877-800-3393
toll free